

“PLAGUED WITH MORE SORE THROATS THAN THE AVERAGE OPERA STAR”:
THE ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF HEMINGWAY’S
FASCINATION WITH THE THROAT

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“Plagued with More Sore Throats Than the Average Opera Star”:

The Origins and Significance of Hemingway’s Fascination with the Throat

Violence to the throat continually pops up in Hemingway’s works, most often by surprise. Take “Indian Camp” when the new father slits his own throat: Nick “pulled back the blanket from the Indian’s head. His hand came away wet. He mounted on the edge of the lower bunk with the lamp in one hand and looked in. The Indian lay with his face toward the wall. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets” (CSS 69). Or *To Have and Have Not* when someone’s throat is slit as an example of what happens to snitches, “All right. It was a close-up picture of the head and chest of a dead nigger with his throat cut clear across from ear to ear and then stitched up neat and a card on his chest saying in Spanish: ‘This is what we do to Lenguas Largas’” (39). In *A Farewell to Arms*, a barber threatens Frederic with a razor after accidentally mistaking him for an Austrian. He writes, “‘Ho ho ho,’ the porter laughed. ‘He was funny. One move from you he said and he would have—’ he drew his forefinger across his throat” (98). Even in his early newspaper story “A Free Shave,” this violence makes its appearance in the form of a threat, “The young barbers looked at one another significantly. One made an expressive gesture with his forefinger across his throat. ‘He’s going upstairs,’ said a barber in a hushed voice” (BL 6).

However, having the throat slit is not the only way that Hemingway kills his characters with such violence. Choking was another way that he killed his characters. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry's newborn son is choked to death before he is even born: "Maybe he was choked all the time. Poor little kid. I wished the hell I'd been choked like that" (350).

Hemingway's story "After the Storm" opens right after a drunken fight in which the protagonist is choked almost to death: "I slipped and he had me down kneeling on my chest and choking me with both hands like he was trying to kill me. . . . I couldn't swallow for a week. He hurt my throat bad" (CSS 283). And in Hemingway's manuscript for his early, and little-discussed and as yet unpublished, short story "How Death Sought Out the Town Major of Roncade," Vergara, the mayor of Italian village Roncade, is killed by the lone ranger, Sarsi, who chokes him in the middle of the night: "Then he took a hand grenade from his pocket and squeezed it into the breast pocket of Vergara's pyjamas. Then he squeezed Vergara's throat very gently until the town major awoke staring. . ." (KL/EH item 477a, 4). All of this evidence points to this idea: Hemingway was fascinated, and almost obsessed, with the throat and violence to it.

Hemingway's obsession with violence to the throat isn't a failure of imagination—a monotonous return to a familiar trope—it is deeply rooted in his biography. As a child, Hemingway suffered from a severe trauma to the throat, and throughout his life, he suffered from sore throats, often causing him to become bedridden and forcing him to stay away from his friends and family. As his brother, Leicester, remembered, Ernest was "plagued with more sore throats than the average opera star" (qtd. in *Letters* vol. 5 524). It would weigh on his mind, causing him considerable agony. His close friend, A. E. Hotchner noted that, "Ernest fretted about it every day. He fretted about his throat, which he was sure was conked out" (196). This

fretful attitude is what made this ailment so serious. It clouded his mind with worry, had a major impact on his life, and it made itself felt in his fictionalized worlds.

Yet, in these worlds the throat is not portrayed simply as something that is a hindrance to the characters. Rather, Hemingway writes about it in a way that shows sexual longing—the complete opposite from his actual experiences. In for *Whom the Bells Tolls*, for instance, when Robert Jordan first meets Maria, he is overwhelmed with desire and feels an “ache in his throat and his voice thickening” (19). A little later, as he admires Maria, with her “shirt open at the throat, the cup of her breasts up tilted against the shirt, ... his throat was choky and there was a difficulty in walking... (25). In his book *Hemingway’s Fetishism*, Carl Eby points to similar instances of erotic throat swelling in *A Farewell to Arms*, “The Sea Change,” *To Have and Have Not*, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, *Islands in the Stream*, “The Summer People,” and *The Garden of Eden*. Eby argues, I think correctly, that the throat and voice were erotically charged symbols within Hemingway’s larger field of fetishistic fantasy, but I want to suggest in this essay that he mistakes the origins of Hemingway’s obsession with the throat and the mechanism by which it became incorporated into his field of fetishistic fantasy. I want to suggest instead that Hemingway unconsciously turned personal pain into something that he wanted to feel, addressing his trauma through sexualization. I hope to demonstrate that this sort of traumophilia, which Eby discusses in relation to other aspects of Hemingway’s fetishism, applies as well to the throat, and this can help us to better understand not just the sexualization, but also the fear and violence with which Hemingway often approaches the throat in his fiction.

I. *Why One Doesn’t Run with Sticks*

In the past decade, the ongoing publication of Hemingway's complete letters has made it clear that throughout most of his life, Hemingway suffered chronically from sore throats, a problem that began with a traumatic incident in his youth. On a summer day, sometime between 1906 and 1912, Ernest was making his daily trip to Bacon's Farm to get the milk when the accident occurred (Baker 10). "Running downhill with a stick in his mouth, he tripped and fell, gouging his throat and tonsils. Fortunately, his father was on hand to cauterize the wound" (Mellow 15). In a 1929 letter to Owen Wister, Hemingway recounts the injury in graphic detail: "In 1919 I had, still have, an aluminum kneecap, bad heart (fine now) hole in the throat about 2 inches deep (all right now) but have to watch it..." (*Letters* vol. 3 537). The disruption to a daily routine, the shock of the injury, and how it was handled left physical—and psychological—scars on Hemingway, causing him to experience persistent sore throats throughout his lifetime. This ailment became a running thread in many of his personal letters, even a bit of an obsession. In these letters, Hemingway often writes of the repercussions of his throat injury and how it affected his daily life.

The letters from Hemingway's early years are not as well documented as the ones in his later life; however, the ones which survived show someone who is confident, proud, and practically untouchable. There is barely any mention of a throat injury in his letters, and when mentioned it is mostly to his father. There is a September 1917 attack of tonsillitis, which Ernest treated by gargling water and peroxide (*Letters* vol. 1 44). Then in August and November 1918, while recovering from his wounding on the WWI battlefield, Hemingway suffered first from trench mouth and then tonsillitis (*Letters* vol. 1 138; 155). He only paid brief attention to his throat in his letters, still sounding like an unstoppable youth. Yet in the following April, under the guidance of his father, Hemingway received an operation on his throat to remedy what had already become a

“chronic” problem (*Letters* vol. 1 186).¹ However, it proved to be unsuccessful, and by November 1919 he was suffering with what he would have called “tonsillitis if I had tonsils. Throat swollen so bad and sore I couldn’t swallow. . . . I haven’t done anything the last couple of days—throat’s been so bad” (*Letters* vol. 1 210-211). In April 1920, he found himself again “laid up with a bad throat,” complaining to his mother that “a throat specialist has been working on it at four bucks a throw so I haven’t been able to cache much of my earnings. It . . . has been quite as sore as it ever was when I had tonsils” (*Letters* vol. 1 229). More bad and ulcerated throats followed in June 1920 and January 1921 (*Letters* vol. 1 234; 266). The problem would continue for the years to come, although it did seem to eventually quiet down for a few years.

In 1925, this throat problem, once again, began to rear its ugly head with vigor, incapacitating and frightening Hemingway during a family ski trip in Austria. It seems that after this bout of sickness his throat took a turn for the worse, becoming an often-cited burden in the years to come. In the first few weeks of December, his old throat injury paired with a cold became a critical case of laryngitis (Baker 160). In a letter written on December 15th, 1925, to his father, a bedridden Hemingway detailed this round of sickness. “My throat very bad and chest cough very deep. Dropped 15 lbs. in three weeks but am sure I will put it on again here” (*Letters* vol. 2 443). The detrimental effect on Hemingway became very clear to him when he tried to take on the ski slopes on December 13th and 14th. Baker writes, “He went out twice to try the ski slopes behind the Taube only to discover that his illness has sapped his strength and weakened his courage” (162). This illness during his winter stay in Austria forced him to not only stay inside and remain inactive, it also prevented him from saying goodbye to many of his friends and

¹ For additional evidence related to this failed surgery, see Lynn 145 and 421, Mary Hemingway 136 and 142-143, Hotchner 75, and Mellow 465.

colleagues who he saw on the trip, dampening two important parts of Hemingway – his daring spirit and vibrant social life—leaving him frustrated and angry.

From approximately December 8th to December 20th, Hemingway wrote to at least five separate people, each letter containing an eye-opening account of his suffering. His letters about his throat during this time sound aggressive, using aggravated and harsh language to describe his condition. On December 8th, Hemingway wrote to Lewis Galantière, “I have Christ's own ulcerated throat and have been working like hell up to the last minute or I would have been around to say goodbye to you and to Dorothy” (*Letters* vol. 2 437). To his good friend Sylvia Beach just one day later, he wrote, “We were both awfully sorry not to get around on Friday to say goodbye. I was laid up with my damned throat and a fever and the throat's just beginning to go down now” (*Letters* vol. 2 438). By December 20th, he wrote to Ernest Walsh and Ethel Moorhead, “Have been down here a little over a week. Was very cold and good snow. Yesterday and today like Spring and the snow sinking fast. I've been sick as the deuce with my throat and chest and working like hell in Paris” (*Letters* vol. 2 453).

In the following year, fed up with this constant ailment, Hemingway ranted again to Ernest Walsh, detailing what was going on and how he was going to fix the problem, using the aggressive language yet again. “Have been sick again. 5 days in bed. Throat swollen shut. Old stuff. Up tomorrow. Plays hell with my heart. Think will have throat operated on again in N.Y. It is simply a bloody nuisance. You're sick but you never write like it. If I'm in bed 2 days I get funereal as Job” (*Letters* vol. 3 15). Whether or not Hemingway ever underwent this surgery is unclear, but his suffering continued, much to his chagrin. In December 1927, Hemingway complained about how things almost took a turn for the worst due to his constant battle. He wrote, “Am sick as a --- with my throat as always this time of year-want to get down there and

get healthy. Nearly died last Spring” (*Letters* vol. 3 336). In spite of his flippant tone, this near-death experience must have made a lasting impression on Hemingway, inspiring fear whenever he was struck down with his throat afterwards.

Constantly living in an anxiety-ridden state whenever bedridden took a toll on his mental health and started harming his relationships, or at least it did in his mind. His throat almost became a hindrance, something that separated him from other people. It was an obstacle that distanced him from ‘normal’ people, so he used it as a compliment to make them feel special. In the March of 1928, Hemingway wrote a letter to Pauline where he did just that. “You are so handsome and talented and your throat never gets sore and you never say “Perhaps my husband Mr. Hemingway cant play well enough to interest you” (*Letters* vol. 3 377). This compliment was a jab at himself, letting his insecurity about his throat come to the surface, veiled as a strange accolade to someone he loved.

In a February 1930 letter written to his mother, Hemingway made sure to end his letter with a sentiment reassuring his mother that his throat was okay (*Letters* vol. 4 241). This may have been in reply to a question in her previous letter to him (which has not been located), but it was something that was always on his mind, and it makes sense that he would reassure his mother that he was fine, regardless of if she was worried or not. A similar out-of-context reference to his throat appears in yet another letter, this one to Maxwell Perkins in December 1931. In this letter, Hemingway was writing about an incident between his two boys when he suddenly stops the story and interjects with, “This rotten throat has filled my head so full of pus that the brain won't work, so enough of this letter” (*Letters* vol. 4 631). The sporadic interruptions of his throat in his letters grow to be an even commoner theme throughout the thirties; so common perhaps that at least he grew better able to deal with them.

In August of 1932, Hemingway was sick with a case of pneumonia that, yet again, manifested in his throat. He wrote to at least four people between the 12th and 15th, each letter detailing his woeful suffering with common descriptors that he had used before — “bad,” “ulcerated,” “hell,” and “damned” (*Letters* vol. 5 192-200). Yet every time he complained of his throat, he quickly shifted to another happier topic, rather than letting his anger get the best of him. This suggests he had matured somewhat concerning his ailment, refusing to allow it to take over his life as it once had. Refusing to stay in the negative, he seems to be bargaining to himself, almost as if his throat would improve if he could only stay positive, though that proved to be a hopeless sentiment.

By May of 1933, Hemingway’s trips were still being interrupted by this ailment, and there was nothing he could do about it. Hemingway wrote to Arnold Gingrich about a fairly successful fishing trip that was close to idyllic, except for his throat. “3 Sunday, 3 Monday, 4 Tuesday — stayed in bed with a hell of a throat. We have a good chance to get the world’s record fish — the hell with the record but by God you ought to see what a fish that size is like in the air” (*Letters* vol. 5 389). He yet again switched from negative to positive, but it was very forced rather than a natural shift. He finally reached a breaking point in October of 1933 and received electro cauterization for his tonsils, with cocaine for anesthetic, making him feel much better (Baker 524). However, this procedure yet again was unsuccessful, and Hemingway still suffered — so much that his brother Leicester said that Hemingway was, “plagued with more sore throats than an average opera star” (qtd. in *Letters* vol. 5 524). After this procedure, evidence of his throat problems in letters largely disappears. It could simply be that the operation worked, but evidence from other sources suggests that this is not the case. Evidence from the letters tapers off only because his complete letters after 1934 have yet to be published.

There is still strong evidence from Hemingway's biographies that Hemingway's throat continued to bother him in the following decades. In the winter of 1934-1935 Pauline and Dos Passos had to wait on Hemingway in his bed because his throat had him bedridden yet again. In reference to this time Dos Passos said, "I never knew an athletic, vigorous man who spent as much time in bed as Ernest did" (Lynn 421, Mellow 465). In June 1937, Hemingway was due to speak at the Second American Writers' Congress. Yet, the main thing that he worried about before his speech was his throat. Hotchner writes that, "Ernest fretted about it every day. He fretted about his throat, which he was sure was conked out" (196). On 18 July 1944, Hemingway, who in June had witnessed from shipboard the D-Day landings at Omaha Beach, returned to Normandy, and one of the first things he did was write about how it affected his airways. In a diary entry documenting this day Hemingway complained of the "ankle deep in dust and huge clouds of dust would billow, blinding and chokeing you" (Baker 401). Ernest's fourth wife, Mary Welsh Hemingway remembered that in 1944, "Hemingway's throat was a rendezvous place for germs" (136).

In 1951, Hemingway sent a letter complaining about his throat to Charlie Scribner. This letter opens with Hemingway, yet again, moaning about his throat, but there is a unsettling shift from how he has previously handled it. Rather than brushing it off as something manageable or complaining about it as he had previously done, Hemingway writes about his throat as a hindrance to his mental health. He wrote as follows, "Thanks for your letter of October 3rd in answer to my black ass letter of whenever it was. I had the bad throat and the letter I wrote in bed the next day to you asking you to disregard anything it said. (Try to write a worse sentence than that!)" (*Letters* vol. 4 738).

Finally, in 1952, one of the last recorded instances of Hemingway's sore throat appears in Hotchner's biography of Hemingway. In a letter sent to Hotchner himself, Hemingway wrote, "On the first, my throat wasn't sore but the soft-palate swollen and sort of a hangover from the really choked up sore throat I had; when it was so sore you couldn't swallow" (Hotchner 75). Hemingway had just finished recording some snippets of information about *For Whom the Bells Toll* to introduce a few episodes of CBS' show *Playhouse 90*. They had adapted this novel into a two-part episodic, bringing Hemingway's work to life. However, rather than being excited about seeing his novel on the big screen, Hemingway chose to focus more on his throat, specifically how talking made it hurt so much. With his declining health, Hemingway had become more reclusive and anxious, writing, "But I'm spooked about the whole thing Hotch" (75). Gone was the proud man from his youth, replaced with someone who suffers internally from just talking.

II. *The Manifestation of the Injury*

Given this history of throat problems, it's perhaps not surprising that a fixation on the throat appears throughout Hemingway's fiction, as it is common for authors to project their struggles onto their characters. However, something that is perhaps not so common is manifesting this struggle with such violence. Hemingway chokes his characters, slits their throats, and threatens them with each of these deaths. Generally, each of these deaths occurs from extenuating circumstances, whether the person is killed by someone else or by themselves, but it is never natural.

In *to Have and Have Not*, as a warning, Harry Morgan is handed a gruesome photo of a dead man. Hemingway writes, "All right. It was a close-up picture of the head and chest of a dead nigger with his throat cut clear across from ear to ear and then stitched up neat and a card

on his chest saying in Spanish: ‘This is what we do to Lenguas Largas.’” (39). This man had been killed in cold blood, with no remorse from the killer. The threat aimed at Harry is clear. Throughout his letters, Hemingway constantly griped about his throat, showing that it was always on his mind, in at least some capacity. One has to wonder if he could really create such a visceral image of death, and the implied threat to his protagonist, without at least unconsciously thinking of his own throat.

This threat to a protagonist whose name, Harry, recalls Hemingway’s favorite fetish object—hair—might help us to notice an odd prevalence of razors in such scenes. While not always the weapon of choice, Hemingway often used the razor as the object that cut the throats, or at the very least something that was threatening enough that his characters were wary around it. In *Indian Camp*, a father kills himself with the razor, slitting his own throat, committing suicide right as his child is born. Nick, who had been so carefully trying not to look at the violence of an anesthesia-free caesarian birth, gets an eyeful of this: “He pulled back the blanket from the Indian's head. His hand came away wet. He mounted on the edge of the lower bunk with the lamp in one hand and looked in. The Indian lay with his face toward the wall. His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The blood had flowed down into a pool where his body sagged the bunk. His head rested on his left arm. The open razor lay, edge up, in the blankets.” (69). Reading such scenes in light of Hemingway’s childhood trauma and chronic sore throats suggests that they may reflect his own fear surrounding his throat. Hemingway’s throat problems were a source of great anxiety, and this evidently never went away. These anxieties, however masked, seemed to surface in his fiction.

An example of Hemingway masking his fear by making light of the situation is found in *A Farewell to Arms*. The porter, who could not stop laughing, felt like it was funny when

Frederic was threatened by the barber, masking Hemingway's own personal fear. The barber was confused about Frederic's nationality, and if he were Austrian he would've killed him right then and there (97).

"Ho ho ho," the porter laughed. "He was funny. One move from you he said and he would have—" he drew his forefinger across his throat. "Ho ho ho," he tried to keep from laughing. "When I tell him you were not an Austrian. Ho ho ho." "Ho ho ho," I said bitterly. "How funny if he would cut my throat. Ho ho ho." (98)

Hemingway masked his own fear of death with the porter's laughter, but inside he felt like Frederic. *A Farewell to Arms* is often seen as a fictionalized version of Hemingway's own experience in the war — his personal wounding and his subsequent relationship with Alice von Kurowsky both provided the basis for this novel. Thus, when the barber could have easily slit Frederic's throat, it is a threat to Hemingway's own throat, paralleling how easy it could have been for Hemingway to suffer the same fate, at least according to his own personal fears.

Hemingway seems to have acted on this intense fear in two distinct ways, the first which was writing out his thoughts in his fiction almost like a coded diary, discreetly revealing the self that he did not want others to see. The other way, however, was sexualizing the trauma. This may seem like an outlandish notion; however, it fits Hemingway's coping to a t. In *Hemingway's Fetishism*, Carl Eby explores Hemingway's methods of coping with the various traumatic situations that Hemingway faced: starting with the pseudo-twinning with his sister in his youth. For several years, Hemingway's mother tried to "twin" him with his sister Marceline, who was in fact eighteen months older. His mother would dress the children in the same outfits, give them the same haircuts, and describe Ernest in photographs with phrases like "summer girl" (89-98). The result, Eby argues, was a splitting of gender identity and the ego that confused young Ernest

and laid the foundation for his later fetishism. Eby recounts, for instance, that when Hemingway was three-and-a-half years old, he became so concerned with this lack of stability in his gender that he was scared that Santa Claus would not be able to tell if he was a boy or a girl (97).

Clearly, this was traumatic for young Hemingway; yet, how does Hemingway imagine erotic scenes in his adult fiction? Again and again, we see twin-like or sibling-like lovers who get erotically excited by haircuts—especially matching haircuts—and the exchange of gender roles in bed. The very pattern that traumatized Hemingway in his youth becomes a prerequisite for his sexual arousal in adulthood.

According to Eby, Hemingway's fetishism didn't manifest, however, until he faced a different sort of trauma: his experiences in World War I (*Hemingway's Fetishism*, 59-62). Soon after he arrived in Italy, Hemingway was sent to find the dead and clean up the scene of a munitions factory explosion (Dahiya, 20). The majority of the workers were women, and so the location was strewn with female body parts, including scalped heads, some with and some without long hair. Hemingway recounts this awful time in *Death in the Afternoon*, "The most disturbing thing, perhaps because it was the most unaccustomed, was the presence and, even more disturbing, the occasional absence of this long hair" (136). Hair was a gender identifier for Hemingway, and seeing some women with hair and some without seems to have reawakened the split in his psyche from his childhood.

Yet, this was not the only war horror that he experienced. In June of 1918, while working with a rolling canteen unit, Hemingway was delivering some goods to his soldiers — chocolates, cigarettes, etc. — when he was wounded in 227 places by an exploding trench mortar and shot in the knee and foot by Austrian soldiers (59). The Italian soldier between Ernest and the shell was killed instantly, while another standing close by "had both his legs blown off" (Reynolds 19).

Hemingway was rushed to a Milan hospital where he recovered, but the experience left lasting scars both physically and mentally. Many years later, for whatever reason, Hemingway told such peers as Philip Young, A. E. Hotchner, and Arthur Mizener that he had been wounded not only in the leg, but also in the testicles— which has been proven false due to the fact that his uniform from the time shows exactly where the mortar fragments hit him on the leg. Still, in *The Sun Also Rises*, which many have seen as Hemingway's heavily fictionalized interpretation of his World War I experience (after all, Jake is named "Ernest" or "Hem" for the first fifty pages on the *Sun* manuscript), Jake Barnes is wounded when he is shot in the genitals (Eby, *Hemingway's Fetishism* 59). In *Hemingway's Fetishism*, Eby notes that fetishism, though rooted in early childhood, often first manifests in young adulthood after a trauma that is construed as a severe castration threat, and this seems to have been the case with Hemingway's now well-known hair fetishism. While no evidence of it exists before WWI, soon after his wounding, a recuperating Hemingway gets in trouble for having the hairpins of his nurse and girlfriend, Agnes Von Kurowsky, beneath his pillow. Evidence of his fetishism abounds thereafter.

More importantly for my argument, in a later essay, "'He Felt the Change So that It Hurt Him All Through': Sodomy and Transvestic Hallucination in Late Hemingway," Eby suggests that other aspects of Hemingway's WWI trauma, such as his preoperative enema, become incorporated into, and account for some of the idiosyncratic features of, his fetishistic scenario—that recurrent and ritualized set of fantasies that appears throughout his works. What he misses, however, is what this reveals about Hemingway's fixation on the throat. In this essay, Eby explores the connection between the enema, which seems to explain the enema scenes in "A Very Short Story" and *A Farewell to Arms*, and his love with Kurowsky. After all, she most likely had to give Hemingway an enema before the operation on his legs (88-89). As Eby notes,

building on the work of psychoanalyst Robert Stoller, the structure of fetishism transforms trauma into triumph, so that the very scenario that threatens the fetishist's gender identity in youth produces a reassuring erection in adulthood and becomes a prerequisite for sexual activity. This, Eby suggests, also holds true for those elements of Hemingway's WWI trauma that get incorporated into his fetishistic scenario. Yet, something Eby failed to notice in this essay is that during his recovery from his wounding, Hemingway also suffered from trench mouth and tonsillitis. Applying the same logic, one can see the link between the throat and sexual triumph — just like the enema. Hemingway's childhood trauma is reawakened during this extremely stressful time in his life, but he coped with the sources of his fear and anxiety by sexualizing them.

Although unaware of the trauma to young Hemingway's throat, his subsequent history of throat problems, and the trench mouth and tonsillitis that plagued Hemingway while he recovered from his WWI wounding, Eby did recognize that the throat played a part in Hemingway's fetishistic scenario, just like the enema, the leg injury, the threat of castration, and hair. Eby writes in *Hemingway's Fetishism* that:

Hemingway's fetishism often . . . makes its presence felt in [his] fiction by a swelling of the male protagonist's throat and a thickening of his voice. When Frederic Henry watches Catherine getting her hair cut and waved near the end of *A Farewell to Arms* he tells us, "My voice was a little thick from being excited" (292). Or when Robert Jordan first meets Maria with her tawny brown face and closely-cropped, golden brown hair in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, "His throat [feels] too thick for him to trust himself to speak" (25). When Marie Morgan bleaches her hair in *To Have and Have Not*, she gets "an excited feeling all funny

inside, sort of faint like” and notes that Harry’s “voice was thick and funny when he said, ‘Jesus, Marie, you’re beautiful’” (259). In “The Sea Change,” Phil tells his lover, a woman with “smooth golden brown” skin and short blonde hair, to go ahead and have a lesbian affair ostensibly against his own wishes, but “his voice sounded strange to him,” indicating a not-so-secret desire to experience the relationship by proxy (CSS 397). ““And when you come back,” he adds, ““tell me all about it.’ His voice sounded very strange. He did not recognize it” (400). In *Islands in the Stream*, when Thomas Hudson’s ex-wife takes off her hat and shakes her hair loose, “hair that was the same silvery ripe-wheat color as always,” Hudson’s throat “aches” (306-7). After Catherine Bourne first transforms herself into “Peter” and her husband into “Catherine,” in *The Garden of Eden* manuscript, David’s voice feels “thick” (K422.1 1.22). And we see this characteristic thickening of the voice yet again in *Across the River and Into the Trees*. Over a meal at *Harry’s Bar* in Venice, Cantwell and Renata discuss a portrait of Renata with her hair “twice as long as it has ever been,” and the nineteen-year-old Renata proposes that the fifty year-old Cantwell call her “daughter”; Cantwell objects that “that would be incest,” but “his voice was thickened a little,” suggesting that the incestuous undertones might not be entirely disagreeable (98). (41-42)

Yet, in his book, Eby links Hemingway’s sexualization with the throat to Grace Hall Hemingway and her career as an opera singer and voice instructor, writing, “If Ernest thought of his mother as phallic, as Freud’s theory would have us believe, why should he not have endowed one of his mother’s most impressive qualities with phallic significance?” (50). While not completely off-beat by any means, this answer neglects the crucial role played by childhood and

adult trauma in Hemingway's sexualization of the throat. Rather, this sexualization of the throat, if we are to relate it back to his other instances of traumophilia surrounding the hair and enema, comes from the time when Hemingway stabbed the back of his throat with a stick and from the repercussions that he felt for the rest of his life—a constant reminder for him.

In fact, the sexualization of the throat became a common trope in Hemingway's fiction, and it is often found in conjunction with his primary fetish: hair. More feminine haircuts are generally longer, and so the hair hangs close to or around the neck. Eby references a time in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* when the hair and the throat are sexualized together. As Maria runs her fingers through her hair and responds to the way Robert Jordan stares at her and her cropped head, Hemingway writes, "'That is the way I comb it,' she said to Robert Jordan and laughed. 'Go ahead and eat. Don't stare at me....' Every time Robert Jordan looked at her he could feel a thickness in his throat" (22). The thickness in Jordan's throat is in direct relation to the way that Maria is brushing her hair. Normally hair brushing is not considered a sexual act, but the way that Hemingway writes about Jordan's reaction is a clear indicator that for Hemingway it is. This instance of sexualization, however, is not an isolated instance, furthering the fact that the hair and the throat are linked.

Later in the novel, Hemingway yet again sexualizes the throat and the hair, combining fetishistic responses to both objects.

"I have thought about thy hair," he said. "And what we can do about it. You see it grows now all over thy head the same length like the fur of an animal and it is lovely to feel and I love it very much and it is beautiful and it flattens and rises like a wheat field in the wind when I pass my hand over it." "Pass thy hand over it." He did and left his hand there and went on talking to her throat, as he felt his own throat swell." (345).

Reading this scene with the prior knowledge of his traumophilia changes the meaning of it completely. When Jordan was talking about Maria's hair, he not only felt the desire in his throat, but he also was looking at hers, again combining the throat and the hair. On the one hand, he sexualized a woman's throat, while on the other he sexualized a man's. This can be related back to his March 1928 letter to Pauline, where he used the throat, or better yet the healthy throat, as a compliment for his wife. Hemingway wrote, "You are so handsome and talented and your throat never gets sore and you never say 'Perhaps my husband Mr. Hemingway can't play well enough to interest you'" (*Letters* vol. 3 377). This personal inadequacy he feels in connection with his throat is reflected when both throats are sexualized. Hemingway lacks a healthy throat, which in turn makes him feel emasculated. However, he counteracts this feeling of inadequacy by sexualizing both the female and the male throats in this passage. This, in turn, highlights the previously mentioned gendered split that came about in his childhood. Both the male and female throats were sexualized because Hemingway felt emasculated by his ailment, unable to relate to his perception of the masculine because of how inadequate it made him feel. In regards to Jordan and Maria, it seems like Hemingway made them equals in the bedroom, yet this was a seemingly unconscious side effect because many of his characters still face gendered norms.

However, this sexualizing of the throat is not always shown in both genders. At times, it only affected the man or only affected the woman, depending on the nature of the scene. When a female character experienced desire in their throats, it is normally brushed passed. When a man felt desire in his throat, however, it was almost celebrated with the amount of detail that Hemingway included in such scenes. This could be because of the gendered disparity of power at the time: women were supposed to be weak and mild while men were the strong leaders.

An instance of this is found in *The Torrents of Spring* with Diana. Distraught with the growing distance of her husband, she laments to herself in the restaurant, “Every night at the restaurant, she couldn't call it a beanery now—that made a lump come in her throat and made her throat feel hard and choky. Every night at the restaurant now Scripps and Mandy talked together. The girl was trying to take him away. Him, her Scripps. Trying to take him away. Take him away. Could she, Diana, hold him?” (42). This “lump” in her throat is a combination of both emotional distress and sexual yearning. She sees that her husband is falling for Mandy, but she is still in love with him. Diana’s inability to speak is the manifestation of Hemingway’s negative perception of the throat, yet it was sexualized because that was his coping mechanism.

In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, however, the man is the one who experiences most of the desire and it is admired further throughout the work, first appearing when Hemingway describes Robert Jordan’s primal reaction to seeing Maria for the first time. He writes, “Robert Jordan felt the ache in his throat and his voice thickening” (19). This choky feeling, makes it hard for Jordan to speak and get thoughts out. This “ache” and “thickening” of his throat and voice is the physical reaction of Jordan’s lust towards Maria, his emotions taking over and constricting his vocal chords with erotic desire. This connection to the voice is something that can also be traced back to Hemingway’s letters. Often, when his throat was at its worst, Hemingway’s voice would go in and out. At this moment, he gained power over his throat by having Jordan experience pleasure and arousal, the complete opposite from Diana. While she had the same physical feelings, she was not able to act on them because her lover fell for someone else. Jordan was able to eventually act on his, consummating his feelings with Maria.

This idea of gender disparity, or rather the emasculated versus the maculated, is yet again found in *A Farewell to Arms*, but it is much subtler. This unintentional moment, as shown

through the subtleness of the passage, suggests that Hemingway unconsciously feared such emasculation. Even if this fear were conscious, people do not readily admit to themselves or to their peers that they have a conflict within themselves, and during Hemingway's time, admitting inadequacy was even more frowned upon. Regardless, his literature still shows that it was something that he struggled with. And this example shows just that. Frederic Henry is rowing a small boat for miles in a storm while Catherine Barkley is sitting and commenting on the things around them and on Henry himself. This fairly mundane task is something that shouldn't normally be sexualized, but it is. Hemingway used the familiar arousal of choking for Barkley. He writes, "Don't be cross, darling. It was awfully funny. You looked about twenty feet broad and very affectionate holding the umbrella by the edges—' she choked." (291). Catherine, while watching Frederic row, begins to choke when describing him. Specifically, after she called him affectionate, which is a word that holds mild physical connotations. While not outwardly displaying her affection, Hemingway still gives the reader inside access into Catherine's thoughts by having her "choke." There was no food or water for her to choke on, so this choking seems to be a symbol for sexual desire. Yet, what is interesting in this scene is how Hemingway gendered both parties through stereotyping them. Frederic was the unemotional man who was going about his business while Catherine was the overly emotionalized and sexualized female, being aroused at the sight of him. In this scene Hemingway identified more clearly with Catherine, but in not wanting to appear too feminine, he exaggerated her reaction to a mundane event, trying to distance his physical persona so no one could connect him outright.

However, while the words choking and chokiness are clearly sensual words in his works, they also hold a double and darker meaning, becoming the cause of death. The traumophilia and sexualization of the throat that he manifests in his fictional works seems to be null when

considering the many characters who died by getting their throat slit, drowning, etc. One of the most jarring and confusing examples of this comes from *A Farewell to Arms*. When he first sees his dead son, Frederic Henry has a longing to be choked just like his son, even though his son was strangled. Hemingway writes, “He had never been alive. Except in Catherine. I’d felt him kick there often enough. But I hadn’t for a week. Maybe he was choked all the time. Poor little kid. I wished the hell I’d been choked like that. No I didn’t. Still there would not be all this dying to go through” (350). When related to the position of the throat in his erotic symbolism, this seems like a sick manifestation of Hemingway’s mind. Yet, that may not be the case.

Hemingway’s fear of death surrounding the throat stems from the castration anxiety that played such a prominent role in his fetishism. Castration anxiety is the fear of the removal of the phallic object, which in this instance, is the throat. While not removed in the traditional sense, intense harm came to the throat, so much so that Frederic’s son died because of it. In one way, Hemingway was trying to overcome this anxiety through sexualizing it, as he had so often done successfully. He wanted Frederic Henry to be choked because it was something that symbolized power over fear. However, he was unsuccessful because the reality was still there — Frederic Henry’s son had still died and there was nothing that he could do about it, especially because the child had been dead inside of Catherine. The triumph that Hemingway felt overcoming his irrational fear and anxiety failed, revealing itself in an amalgam of misplaced sexual tension and an intense overarching fear of castration, which manifested itself in death.

Much of Hemingway’s anxiety about the throat seems inseparable from the issue of the castration anxiety that stemmed from the two operations on his throat and his fear of wounding himself. Freud famously claimed that “an investigation of fetishism is strongly recommended to anyone who still doubts the existence of the castration complex” (155). As a fetishist,

Hemingway had an intense fear of castration. His painful relationship with his own throat and the subsequent sexualization of the trauma that came from the relationship caused Hemingway to have an intense and confusing relationship with the body part. Thus, when any unintentional harm came to the throat, it was seen as something negative. In relation to his fetish, the castration anxiety that comes from this is equally as intense, manifesting itself in the death of a character. Along with this castration anxiety, one object that continually appears in Hemingway's fetishistic scenario is a razor. For Hemingway, the razor held fetishistic properties because of its relationship to hair and castration properties because it could cut hair and throats — removing the phallus.

In an early newspaper piece *A Free Shave*, the unnamed reporter apologizes to the experienced students of a barber college because he is going upstairs. Upstairs is where the new students practice their work, putting the reporter in a very risky environment. If he wanted to be safe, he would have stayed in the lower level with the experienced students, paying five cents for a shave. But, he chose to go upstairs to get a free shave, risking his life in the process. Hemingway writes, “‘I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘I’m going upstairs.’ Upstairs is where the free work is done by the beginners. A hush fell over the shop. The young barbers looked at one another significantly. One made an expressive gesture with his forefinger across his throat. ‘He’s going upstairs,’ said a barber in a hushed voice” (*BL* 6). The moment the reporter entered the upper level, his life was threatened — specifically his neck. The fact that Hemingway even imagined a situation such as this occurring in the barber's shop is so telling as this is something that men normally do not fear, or rather do not express. The barber's chair is supposed to be a place of trust and clearly Hemingway has none. Later on, while being lathered, he is yet again faced with a random threat to his life. He writes, “A hush fell over the shop. The young barbers looked at

one another significantly. One made an expressive gesture with his forefinger across his throat..."Say, do you want to have your throat cut?" he enquired pleasantly. "No," said I." (6).

While not specifically mentioned in this example, it is still clear that the razor is the object of the threat. While odd that the barber was described as "pleasant," it makes sense when relating it back to Hemingway's odd and flippant attitude towards his own throat when the article was published. Written in 1920, this newspaper story fell right around the time that Hemingway had his unsuccessful operation on his throat. He was very dismissive with his throat condition until 1925, and so writing about this threat to his own life in such a nonchalant way mirrors the attitude he had towards his own throat. However, including this threat twice in this articles shows that regardless of how he showed it on the outside, he was still struggling with this strange mix of intense fear and sexualization.

This convoluted merger between sexual triumph and death is something that continues to reoccur in Hemingway's work, allowing readers to see just how confused Hemingway was with the entire thing, relating back to his defense mechanisms concerning trauma. This is clearly seen in an unpublished manuscript for his little-discussed early and still unpublished short story *How Death Sought out the Town Major of Roncade*. In doing a close reading of this manuscript this misplaced or unnoticed sexual tension is extremely clear.

This short story takes place in an Italian village known as Roncade during World War I. Roncade is described as, "hot white town in the backwash of the June offensive" (1), instantly setting the scene of the story as a place where people do not readily go. The town is viewed as a pass-through place, with camions holding troops and ambulances with the wounded barreling through, throwing up the dust (1). The constant heat and "open mufflers" (2) making conditions

extremely poor. Hemingway writes, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Villa Rosa was a brothel of sorts, but when the war started moving closer and closer to Roncade, a camion came and, “the Signora in charge and her five girls were bundled in by the smirking camion driver and driven away” (2). Now the only constants in Roncade were the two girls and the self-appointed Major, Vergara. Matthew Stewart writes that, “Political connections have gotten Vergara his cushy job, and the accidental nobility of his birth is contradicted by actuality: he is fat, lazy, drunken, and worst of all in the story’s terms, cowardly” (211).

Life in Roncade was nowhere peaceful, but the two girls made a living off the soldiers who came looking for food, paying no heed as they, “shouted pleasant obscenities” (1) at the girls since there were never any sexual advances towards them. Yet, one night this routine life changed as the war got closer.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The girls were huddled together in their shared bed, whispering comforting thoughts to each other as they heard the gunshots and shouts of pain, sharing sentiments that nothing could break through their door and that they would be safe, solidifying this by praying to the “Virgen Mary to guard the army and the line of the Piave” (2).

The youngest sister still cried, but not in fear for her safety but fear for the men on the frontlines (2). In just two pages Hemingway has already characterized the two girls from the story—making them braver and stronger than the major, even though he was supposed to protect

them. Rather than praying for their own personal safety, the youngest cried for the people on the frontlines while the oldest comforted her, showing great maturity for someone who is perceived to be fairly young.

The following day, once the battle had ended, a camion carrying the remnants of the troops from the previous battle pulled into Roncade while they waited for replacements, the rest of the battalion having been, “spewed up out of the hell to the north” (2). One of the men who had survived the horrific battle was a “little short ardito from Sardinia” (3) called Sarsi.

The sisters instantly grew fond of Sarsi as he had bowed to them when he entered their little café, gaining their favor as he contrasted rude Vergara. Sarsi gets to talking with the youngest sister, and after some subtle flirting he learns about the true nature of Vergara. In her description of the major, the sister, who we also learn is only sixteen, says, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] She then begins to cry repeating, “Oh he is such a liar” (3).

This reaction that she is having is never explained, but through her description one can piece together that the major had once had sexual relations with her. He could have promised her something, using his appointed power as the protector of the town to get her to sleep with him, regardless of her young age. This sends Sarsi into a rage, though there is no motive as to why. Sarsi’s character is very underdeveloped and so it is not known if he had any personal experience with sexual assault or having someone close to him being assaulted, but it seems to be the case as to how violently he reacts to hearing the young girl tell her story.

Sarsi gently asks the girl where he could find the major, and she tells him that he is asleep upstairs. Sarsi, without giving his true motives away, smiles at the girl. He, again, is a foil to Vergara as he makes her feel comfortable with just a smile while Vergara, the protector of the

town, causes her great fear. Sarsi goes upstairs to the sleeping Vergara and in this climatic scene, Vergara meets his end.

Hemingway writes,

[REDACTED]

Sarsi sneaks up on the major while he is asleep and creeps up on top of him. The act in killing him is very slow and sensual when normally assassination attempts are quick and concise. The slow way that Sarsi goes about things is very interesting, especially because Sarsi is killing a child predator, which is something that most people would have little problem doing in their fiction as predators are unanimously seen as disgusting people

The first major thing to note is that Sarsi was going to end the major's life by choking him. Choking, as previously mentioned, was something that was both sensual and upsetting to Hemingway, symbolizing the amalgam of his emotions. This was an earlier work of Hemingway's, and so he had not yet perfected the discreteness of his personal anxieties as he did in his later works, thus this confusion is rather blatant, and so is his vernacular.

The words like "bulge" and "squeezed" are clearly sexualized when applying them to the bedroom, however when applying them to death they take on a whole other meaning, especially because there were two men in this scene. By having the two men in a very sexualized position, Hemingway had to kill one. This is because it was not natural for him in his internal identity. Every sexual encounter between two people is with a male and a female. The man is overly masculinized and the female is overly feminized. However, with two men there was no way for Hemingway to place his identity in just one, and so he sexualized the death. This is something that is very clear in some of Hemingway's works.

As seen throughout this section, Hemingway struggled with so much inside himself that he couldn't share openly, and so he expressed himself through his fiction. The constant pressure that his throat put on his mental state manifested itself into two distinct things: violence and sexualizing trauma. On one hand, Hemingway blatantly showed his audience that he was struggling, allowing his characters to face gruesome deaths in his place. However, he also sexualized the trauma from his childhood injury just as he did with his other World War I experiences: his wounding, cleaning up the factory, and the humiliating enema that was administered by the woman he soon grew to love. This is further shown as Hemingway makes a direct connection with Sarsi whose brother died on Fossalta road as Hemingway had fought there as well.

The manuscript ends as Sarsi pulls the pin to the grenade and runs out the door, slamming it shut before it explodes (4). The Lieutenant who was also in the café heard the explosion and questions Sarsi, who said that the major had committed suicide with assistance, something which the Lieutenant seemingly approves of (4). Before leaving, Sarsi asks to go and speak to the priest before going out onto the lines again, which the Lieutenant approves, and then the story ends. This abrupt ending is clearly because the manuscript was unfinished, and thus there was probably more to the story. Yet, the main idea to take away is this climactic sexual death as it showed the strengthening of the gendered and ego split and the extreme castration anxiety that manifested itself in death — perfectly combining everything proven in the essay.

Overall, Hemingway was a confusing man who faced so many hardships in one lifetime. His childhood was continually wrought with strange experiences, being twinned with his older sister and stabbing the back of his throat with a stick. These experiences, in turn, became sexualized in Hemingway's mind because of his innate fetishistic tendencies. His often-severe sore throat was something that continued to plague him throughout his life, causing him to incorporate the trauma that went along with it in his fiction—both in a violent and a sexual way. Reading the scenes of his fiction that invoke the sexual nature of the throat and the violent threats and acts allows the readers to have clarity into the often-mysterious life of Ernest Hemingway.

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